REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

These remarks are submitted in response to the Office Action dated May 26, 2006 (Office Action). As this response is timely filed within the 3-month shortened statutory period, no fee is believed due. However, the Office is expressly authorized to charge any deficiencies and to credit any overpayments to Deposit Account No. 50-0951.

In the Office Action, each of the claims was rejected on the basis of new grounds of rejection. Claims 1-33 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(a) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 7,003,546 to Cheah (hereinafter Cheah).

Applicants have amended independent Claims 1, 7 15, 16, 22, and 30 to further emphasize certain aspects of the invention. Dependent Claims 4 and 19 have been amended to maintain consistency with the respective claims from which each depends. As discussed herein, the claim amendments are fully supported throughout the Specification. No new matter has been introduced through the claim amendments.

Applicants' Invention

It may be helpful to reiterate certain aspects of Applicants' invention prior to addressing the newly-cited reference. One embodiment of the invention, typified by amended Claim 1, is a method of connecting businesses through common interests and for facilitating business relationships among businesses. The method can include identifying a plurality of businesses to participate in an online business registry, and storing business profiles comprising business attributes in the online business registry. Each business profile, more particularly, can be associated with one of the identified businesses, and can include for each identified business a corresponding customer list, at least one business function associated with the identified business, and at least one market segment associated with the identified business. (See, e.g., Specification, p. 6,

lines 16-23.) The business attributes of each stored business profile can be classified into one of a plurality of access levels. In response to a query from an inquiring business, the online business registry can be searched to locate at least one business having a business profile including at least one business attribute corresponding to the query.

The method further can include determining whether the inquiring business and at least one located business are competitors. (See, e.g., Specification, p., line 16 – p. 7, line 12.) The determination can be based upon a comparison of customer lists, associated business functions, and associated market segments. (See, e.g., Specification, p. 6, lines 16-23; see also p. 6, line 24 – p. 7, line 5.) Accordingly, information access of the inquiring business can be restricted to less than all of the plurality of access levels of business attributes of the at least one located business, if the at least one located business and inquiring business are determined to be competitors with one another.

Additionally, the method can include establishing at least one communications link between the inquiring business and the located business based on one or more of the business attributes of the business profile of the located business. Moreover, identified businesses can comprise both the inquiring business and one or more located businesses.

The Claims Define Over Cheah

Cheah is directed to a system for managing and distributing "contact information" over a communications network. (See, e.g., Col. 2, lines 2-24; see also Abstract.) Applicants respectfully submit, however, that Cheah fails to expressly or inherently teach every feature recited in the claims.

For example, Cheah does not teach an on-line business registry for storing business profiles comprising various attributes of corresponding businesses. In particular, Cheat nowhere discloses stored information corresponding to a list of customers of a particular business, one or more business functions performed by the

particular business, or particular market segments in which the particular business operates.

At page 5 of the Office Action, it is stated that Cheah discloses an on-line business registry that includes at least one business function and market segment corresponding to each business registered with the registry. The particular portion of Cheah cited discloses the following:

> "[A] rolodex processing 1000 is performed on the client-side application. The rolodex processing 1000 initially selects a contact card associated with an entity to be contacted. The client-side application typically stores numerous contact cards. Hence, the selection may make use of some searching through the cards or placing the cards into categories to facilitate the selection of a desired one of the contact cards." (Col. 16, lines 44-52.)

Applicants respectfully note that the quoted language nowhere describes or even alludes to a particular business' customers, let alone the specific functions performed or market segments occupied by a particular business. The quoted language refers only to "contact cards" maintained in an electronic version of a rolodex. Throughout the reference, Cheah refers to "lists of requestors," but these requestors pertain only to entities seeking contact information. No list of a requestor's customers is provided. Thus, even if one considers a requestor to be a business registered with an electronic business registry, it follows that the registry only contains the names of businesses to contact, not lists of customers associated with any of the registered businesses.

More fundamentally, Cheah makes explicit that each electronic rolodex-type contact card contains only standard information in a typical business card for contacting the person named: individual name, company affiliation, individual's title, address,

telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address. (See, e.g., Col. 16, lines 53-62; see also Col. 15, line 45 – Col. 16, line 32.) As specifically described, the contact card is an electronic version of a standard business card that one might otherwise store in a standard rolodex. Cheah's contact card provides no electronically stored business information. In particular, none of Cheah's contact cards provide business information regarding a particular business' customers, its functions, or the markets in which the business operates.

Even more fundamentally, Cheah nowhere explicitly or inherently teaches determining whether two or more businesses registered with an on-line business registry are competitors of one another. Specifically, Cheah does not disclose determining whether a business making an inquiry to the business registry is a competitor with another business located on the business registry in response to the inquiry, as explicitly recited in Claims 1, 7 15, 16, 22, and 30. Moreover, Cheah nowhere discloses determining whether two or more registry-listed businesses are competitors based upon a comparison of their respective customer lists, associated business functions, and associated market segments, as further recited in Claims 1, 7 15, 16, 22, and 30.

At page 3 of the Office Action, it is stated that Cheah determines whether an inquiring business and located business are competitors based upon a comparison of customers list. The portion of Cheah cited in support of the contention explicitly provides the following:

> "FIG. 18D is a screen illustration of a representative limitations screen according to an embodiment of the invention in which various exchange options can be selected (block 1222). In the screen illustration, <u>the requested party is accepting the request to exchange profile information with the limitations that only the restricted personal information of address</u>

and email (as well as name) are permitted to be exchanged. Other limitations screens can be used." (Col. 20, lines 19-27.)

Applicants respectfully note that allowing one party to accept a request to exchange profile information subject to proscribed limitations has nothing to do with making a determination as to whether two or more registry-listed businesses are competitors of one another. Moreover, as already noted, Cheah does not provide a registry that includes attributes for registered businesses, such as customer lists, business functions, or market segments. It follows, accordingly, that it is impossible for Cheah to determine whether two or more registry-listed businesses are competitors of one another by comparing respective customer lists, business functions, and market segments, as explicitly recited in Claims 1, 7, 15, 16, 22, and 30.

The Date of Applicants' Invention is Prior to Cheah

Applicants respectfully note that each of the claims was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(a) as being anticipated by Cheah. The date of the cited patent, however, is February 6, 2006, which is well after the filing date of the present application. It has long-been established that subject matter is prior art under 35 U.S.C. § 102(a) only if the subject matter is publicly available. There is no evidence that the subject matter claimed in Cheah was publicly known or used prior to the date of the patent, nor is there any evidence that the subject matter had been previously described in a printed publication prior to the date of the patent. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request clarification of the basis for concluding that Cheah supports the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 102(a).

CONCLUSION

Applicants believe that this application is now in full condition for allowance, which action is respectfully requested. The Applicants request that the Examiner call the undersigned if clarification is needed on any matter within this Amendment, or if the Examiner believes a telephone interview would expedite the prosecution of the subject application to completion.

Respectfully submitted,

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